A WORLD'S CONGRESS OF MINERS

By John Mitchell, in Collaboration With Walter E. Weyl.

Paris, Sept. 6.

FOR five days the representatives of the miners of the world were meeting in the Bourse de Travail at Paris under the auspices of the Miners' International Congress. For fifteen years this congress had held annual sessions, at which question of interest to the miners of the world have been taken up and discussed.

The meeting this year was the most important since the organization of the International Congress. For the first time in its history there were present at the congress delegates from the United States, and thus the seventy-seven members represented almost all the coal mining countries of the world, or, in other words, almost the entire coal mining population of the world, that is, 2,069,500 miners. There were representatives from all parts of Great Britain, from Germany, Austria, France, Belgium and the United States, which countries produce over nineteen-twentieths of the entire amount of coal mined.

It is always extremely difficult for men of different nationalities and speaking different languages to meet and discuss problems of common interest. The majority of the representatives understood English but neither French or German, while those who spoke either French or German were ignorant of the other two languages. As a consequence all the proceedings, including the speeches of the delegates had to be translated and retranslated, so that it took thirty minutes for a ten minutes' speech to reach the understanding of all the delegates. However, the translators were extremely able, and the delegates limited their speeches to the most important matters, with the result that the proceedings were very much more rapid and intelligible than might have been expected.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the advantages which have resulted from the annual meetings of the Miners' International Congress. The effect has been to inspire the delegates from the more backward countries with the hope of improving the condition of the miners whom they represent. In the past the initiative in these congresses was usually taken by the English miners. At first the German, French and Belgian delegates were unfamiliar with parliamentary rules, and the course of the sessions was delayed by a number of men trying to speak at once; but in the last session, and in a number of sessions previous, the congress was conducted in the most admirable method, and the rules of parliamentary procedure were adhered to strictly. The various nationalities displayed the utmost courtesy and consideration toward one another, and friendliness and good-fellowship reigned throughout the congress.

Since the beginning of these annual congresses the conditions of European miners have been everywhere improved. Wages have risen, the hours of labor have been reduced, and the sanitary condition of the mines has been bettered. Another gain during this time has been the prohibition by practicaly all the countries represented of work by women inside the mines. While many women in Europe pick slate and do other rough work on the outside of the mines almost none work inside.

The proceedings of the congress are conducted in a rapid, sensible and business-like manner. Each day a president is elected, who serves for that day only, and for each nationality a separate president is also elected. The credentials of the delegates are passed upon by members of their own nationality, and only in cases of dispute (which have not yet arisen) are questions of this sort submitted to the business committee. This business, or international committee, which agrees upon the proceedings and acts as a sort of executive committee, consists of one member from each nationality. The delegates to the congress must be either miners or miners' secretaries, but the public is admitted to the deliberations. In discussing any measure or motion one speaker is heard from each nationality, and the speeches are usually made as short as possible in order to prevent a needless waste of time in translation.

Much of the discussion during the present congress bore upon the subjects of shorter working hours and the establishment of a minimum wage. The hours of labor have already been somewhat reduced in continental countries, while in England they are already shorter than in the United States. As in America, the miners of Europe are endeavoring to secure a universal eight-hour day for miners and considerable progress has already been made in this direction.

The congress was unanimous in its vote to obtain by such means as were best suited to the situation in the various countries the speedy establishment of a minimum wage. The greatest possible difference exists between the wages of miners in various parts of Europe. In Great Britain the wages, until the last year or two, have been relatively high, comparing not unfavorably with the wages of American miners. In France and Belgium, however, wages are much lower, and in certain parts of Germany, notably in the eastern or Silesian district, and throughout Austria, the rate of remuneration is so low that the workingman cannot live in decency, and in many cases cannot even maintain himself in physical vigor. Generally speaking, wages are highest where the men are best organized, and it is one of the objects of the congress, therefore, to spread unionism into all parts of Europe, in order to maintain a fair rate of wages for coal mining throughout the world.

One of the most serious questions discussed by the congress was that of mine sanitation. In many parts of Europe, in Great Britain, France, Belgium and in other countries, the miners suffer from a worm disease called ankilostomaisis. This worm, which is very small, is usually to be found in damp and badly ventilated mines. It destroys the red corpuscles of the blood, and produces a feeling of lassitude and an entire absence of energy, which prevents the men from doing effective work. There are mines in which as many as 90 per cent of the miners are affected by this disease, which not only reduces efficiency of the men, but weakens them to such an extent that they become highly susceptible to other diseases. The congress took action looking toward the investigation of the worm disease and advocoated legal measures be taken to arrest and combat its propagation.

The chief importance of the congress is its indirect, rather than its direct, consequences. The congress has no power to compel the obedience or even the adherence of the unions in the several countries, but almost all of the resolutions are adopted by unanimous vote, and the congress exerts a strong moral influence upon the miners' organizations and upon the community in general. The European newspapers devoted considerable space to the proceedings of the congress, and much interest was manifested in the future plans of the organization. With each year the influence of the congress becomes greater as the miners in the world realize that the problems which beset them are more or less similar in all countries. It is now proposed that the congress eventually form itself into a permanent body by the appointment of an international secretary and the establishment of a central office. If this is accomplished, the permanent secretary will secure information bearing on the conditions of miners in the various countries, and this information, printed in German, French and English, will be widely distributed, so that the miners in each country may be kept informed of the conditions in all parts of the world.

As in all congresses, much of the most important work of the Miners' congress is done outside of the meetings. The influence of the delegates from countries where wages are high and conditions of labor good, upon representatives from countries where organization is just beginning, has been extremely effective and beneficial. The meetings of the congress also lead to the settlement of long standing difficulties. During the present congress, for instance, the American delegates were able to make important arrangements for the transfer or admission of members from one country to another, these arrangements being made with Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. In the past some friction and misunderstanding had arisen owing to the fact that when a Frenchman or German presented himself for admission to the American union and asked as a foreign unionist to be exempted from paying the initiation fee it was frequently impossible to tell whether the applicant was or was not a member of a foreign union. This difficulty has now been entirely done away with by the adoption of a uniform system, and this reform is entirely due to the fact that the delegates of these countries and from America were enabled to meet at an International congress.

The chief service conferred by the International congress has been the moral aid which they have given to the organization of miners into trade unions throughout continental Europe. This organization is proceeding with much rapidity, although the continental miners are still not nearly so well organized as their brethren in the United States and Great Britain. The difficulties of organization are even greater in such countries as Germany and Austria than in the United States. In Germany, for instance, the union has to deal with the same problem of uniting different nationalities as is encountered in the United States. During recent years tens of thousands of people of differing nationalities, including Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Italians, and others, have entered the German mines. These people, usually unable to speak German, live by themselves in company patches, or what are called colonies. Every effort is made, however, to reach the people of foreign nationality and with much success. The German miners, for example, issue an excellent weekly journal, printed in German, but containing one page in Polish, giving the most important news in that language. At first, as in America, the people of foreign birth underbid the native miners, but with the progress of years, the foreign speaking people became strongly imbued with the principles of unionism, and they are now among the most ardent and enthusiastic of unionists. Miners of foreign birth have also invaded the mines of Belgium, and, to a considerable extent, of France, but in all of these countries the problem of different nationalities speaking different tongues is being dealt with in somewhat the same manner as in the United States.

The continental miners, however, have even more serious difficulties to contend with. This is especially true of Germany. The attitude of the great producers of coal is one of absolute, uncompromising and unwavering hostility and at all times they refuse to meet with the union or to discuss terms. The rates of wages, the hours of work, and the conditions of employment are fixed by the large operators, who post notices on the walls. There is no recognition of the union, no conferences between representatives of the two sides, no answer that the men can make except silent acquiescence or a strike. The operators, although organized into huge trusts, are opposed to the very existence of unions and would, if it were possible, take away from the workmen the legal right to join trade unions. The hostility of these large employers goes so far, in fact, as to express a desire for the withdrawal of the franchise from the workingmen by the abolition of universal suffrage.

The hostility of the large operators in Germany towards the unions is reinforced by a determined persecution on the part of the state. Like other public meetings, those of trade unions cannot be held without obtaining permission from the police at least twenty-four hours in advance, and without the presence of police officials at the meetings. The law, however, seems to be enforced with greater vigor and stringency against the unions than against other bodies. The policeman sits upon the platform next to the presiding officer and whenever he considers anything is said or done illegal, he rises, takes off his helmet and respectfully informs the audience that the meeting is dissolved. In many sections of the country the unions are systematically boycotted by the owners of public halls, and in some cases it is practically impossible to hold meetings in any suitable place. Even the meetings of the local organizations are considered public meetings requiring twenty-four hours' notice and the presence of the police, and it is often necessary to forego having meetings at all and to secure the opinion of the members upon important subjects by meeting them individually. The police are harsh in their judgment of offenses committed in trade union meetings, and unionists have been sent to jail for two or three years for offenses which, in America, would not entail more than a small fine.

Notwithstanding all the obstacles the organization of the miners of the world is proceeding rapidly, as is evidenced by the congress of 2,000,000 miners, of whom over 1,000,000 are already enrolled in trade unions.

SAVED LIFE OF PRESIDENT DIAZ

Yankee's Quick Wit Rescued Great Ruler From Soldiers—Splendid Reward in After Years.

HOW the fate of the Mexican republic once hung on the Masonic honor and fidelity of a Brooklyn man is the point of a remarkable political story that has been revived in every Brooklyn lodge by the recent visit to the Mexican capital of a member of Kings County lodge, F. and A. M.

It is the story of a country made stable by the strength and ability of one man, and it contains every element of heroic manhood, unquestioned bravery, passionate politics and grim humor, running the gamut from the fate of a nation to that of a fistic encounter in which future President Diaz was sent sprawling across the deck of an American steamship by a purser who proved to be the greatest friend he ever had.

The facts given below are vouched for by leading Masons in Brooklyn and are in detail as corrected by Rev. T. Morris Terry, of Kings County lodge, a veteran member of the order and a Past Master. The member who is responsible for the revival of the story, because of recent honors extended to him, both in New Orleans and in Mexico City, is another member of the same lodge, John Jerome Farley, an expert connected with the Goodyear (shoe) Machinery company, now of 133½ North Front street, Columbus, O. Among those who have been prominent in an investigation of the story is Fred L. Jenkins, the head of the Veteran Masons, of 452A Hancock street, Brooklyn.

Mr. Farley, however, though his recent visit to the Mexican lodges brought forth the story, was at the time of the series of events that are hereinafter told, a babe in swaddling clothes in Brooklyn. Just who the real hero was is not yet disclosed, but on the statements made to the Eagle yesterday it seems certain that his identity is known to some.

In the early '70s President Diaz was not known as a patriot. Patriots in Spanish-American republics are successful revolutionists. Diaz was not successful in those days. Rather he was a fugitive beyond the confines of his own land, and few who saw him about the cafes and at the festivals of New Orleans paid much more attention to him than did men of later years to Cubans who talked filibustering in Philadelphia before the war with Spain.

At the time there was plying between New Orleans and Vera Cruz an American merchantman, taking to the war-racked nation cotton, grains and foodstuffs, and bringing back the tropical products and the mineral wealth of Mexico. The purser of that vessel was a young man from Brooklyn.

The purser did not know Diaz, nor did he know that there was a price of $50,000 in the head of any man in New Orleans, and the full knowledge of what such a munificent headpiece means did not come back to him till later years, when, tried by fire and found not wanting, he came to his reward by the hand of the man who, on that eventful night he met as an exile in the Louisiana metropolis.

While walking along one of the city streets, thinking of the sailing in the morning, the purser was accosted by a friend, who introduced a quiet looking young man, whom he asked the purser to make a passenger with him on the morrow. The stranger wore a magnificent Masonic emblem.

"He is a fugitive," said the friend, "and must return before it is too late."

"But I can't take him. My ship and my cargo might pay the forfeit," said the purser, shaking his head.

"But you must take him. He is your brother and his very life is at stake," was the stern answer.

The purser wavered and then consented, promising to protect to the utmost the stranger in his cabin from spies and Mexican officials who might be watching for the "rebel" leader.

On the morning, when the ship was passing out of the muddy delta of the Mississippi, Diaz, who even for years afterward was unknown to the man who was befriending him, was seated at the purser's desk. He had been writing on a long, narrow strip of paper. Toying with it as the ink dried, he turned to the purser and slowly said:

"You have helped me, but I must tell you something. I am in your power. There is a prize of $50,000 on my head. To earn that all you will have to do is to hold me till we get to Vera Cruz and deliver me to the military. Senor, you may do that if you like."

The young purser looked steadily at the man before him, started to say something and then stopped. Clearing his throat he slowly and with a voice choked with emotion, answered:

"I don't befriend a man to betray him. I took you aboard. If I can, whatever the cost, I am going to put you on the beach in your own country."

Diaz's eyes filled with tears and all the fire of his ardent nature was in his embrace as he exclaimed fervently:

"Thank you!"

The scene was dramatic, but no master of stage craft ever completed another such with so strong a climax.

Handing the purser that long, narrow strip of paper on which he had been writing, the Mexican said:

"Here is a check equal to what they would pay you."

Again the young purser looked at the man before him, almost angrily, this time, then seizing the paper he tore it to bits that were borne away by the lazy, sluggish gulf winds and lost in the wilderness of blue waters. His answer was:

"I would not take you for money. I won't take money for saving you."

The next of a series of incidents in this game—where the life of a nation, rather than the life of a man was at stake—happened off Vera Cruz, where the American ship came to anchor.

"You must put me ashore," begged the future ruler.

"It's death, man," pleaded the purser. "I can't do it. If you are captured, I will be taken and so will the ship. And they will kill you."

"I must go! I will go! I will swim it!" young Diaz cried with that determination that afterward made him what he is today.

"It's madness, man. You will drown. The harbor is full of sharks. You will never reach the shore."

Diaz was obdurate, however, and that afternoon he divested himself of his heavier clothing, girded on a knife to defend himself against not only man-eating sharks, but man-hunting soldiers, and sprang overboard.

Taking to the water, he headed toward the beach, and the friend who had protected him, so far watched him with his glasses as he rose and fell with the waves, now tossed on their crests, now hidden behind them as they broke in combers on the sand bars.

Suddenly Diaz turned back, and seemed swimming with redoubled effort to regain the ship. Through the breakers there plunged a boat and from it came the glint of sunlight as the red rays struck on the drawn swords of soldiers. The man had been seen and was pursued.

The race was an exciting one, but the swimmer had the start and was alongside as the purser shouted to the men in the fo'castle:

"Line the starboard rail! Lower a line," and made a place for that bit of the ridiculous that so persistently seems to enter into every affair of moment.

As Diaz seized the thrown rope and was drawn aboard the patriot soldiers were already coming up the gangway. The situation was powerful, and a false move would have meant death to the young man.

Yankee wit, however, saved the day. Seizing the wet swimmer by his frowsy hair and giving him a heavy blow behind the ear, the purser threw him to the deck, and, with an oath, pounced upon him and grabbed him by the throat.

"You drunken dog! You hound. I'll teach you to jump ship. I'll teach you to try to drown yourself," he cried.

Then, leaping to his feet, the purser gave orders to put the man into irons, and turning to the astonished soldiers, asked them what he could do for them.

In broken English the leader explained that the country was in the throes of a civil war, and said that all ports were being watched for rebels, who had been driven from the country, but who might at any time return. Seeing a man in the surf, they thought that he had been caught, but were glad to know they were mistaken and that Senor El Captain had got his drunken sailor back." With many other apologies they went away.

The next danger that menaced the young man was when two lighters came alongside to take off the cargo. These had aboard, besides their crews, emissaries of the government, and it was with a good deal of difficulty that the situation was met.

The work of loading was made as slow as possible, and it was long after dark when the scows were filled. Hiding the fugitive as best they could, the officers of the vessels invited the crew to share their hospitality, while Diaz was rowed off into the darkness and put ashore further down the coast. This effort was successful, but it interrupted for years the friendship that had sprung up between the humble purser and the great Mexican leader.

A few years ago, however, there came the climax, and it was brought about with all the dramatic effect of the modern melodrama. The sailor hero of this story chanced to go to Mexico, and among the places he visited was Mexico City. As he alighted from his train he was suddenly arrested by military officers. Being innocent of any wrong he grew indignant and begged to be informed of the cause of his detention.

"This is an outrage; send for the American consul," he cried. But the soldiers only the more pushed him along toward a carriage drawn by gayly caparisoned horses and gave the order to the driver to proceed. Bands played and the hoie poloi along the streets waved their sombreros and shouted. Being arrested with martial honors was something he did not understand.

His amazement grew as the procession drew up in soldierly ranks before the plazza and the American was politely assisted to alight and escorted into the central room of a palace where there stood before him, dressed in a finely fitting frock coat, a thick set man of small stature in whose eyes he saw a look of friendly recognition.

An officer in uniform, still like the stage this story goes, then broke the clouds:

"El Presidente."

The friend of years ago, the exiled rebel, the brother in trouble, was President Diaz, for years the head of the Mexican republic. It all came back to him, even the head price was explained.

"But how did you know I was here?" asked the American.

"My friend, never since the day I left you have I failed to know where you were. I have followed you and watched you prosper. You saved me and you saved Mexico. I could do no less than wait for you to come back to her."

Recently the Masonic papers contained the announcement of the honors bestowed upon an American, but Brooklyn was not connected with the matter till the New Orleans and Mexico lodges sent communications to Rev. Mr. Terry about the visits of Brother Farley.

The Masonic announcement was, however, that the $50,000 which floated away on the warm waters of the gulf stream thirty years ago, was paid later as a present, and that an American Mason, the friend of President Diaz, was holding a responsible office under the Mexican government.—Brooklyn Eagle.